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ABSTRACT

English 1002, an advanced college composition course, is based on the Foxfire Project (in which Appalachian students interview elderly persons about mountain crafts and lore). After two weeks of classroom drill and practice in composition skills, each student is matched with a resident of a home for the elderly, located near the campus. During each of the next four weeks, students interview the elderly persons, write papers growing out of the interviews, and write memoranda to the instructor about their activities. They meet once a week in a formal classroom situation, at which time they read their writing to the class and get needed instruction in composition skills. Frequent instructor/student conferences are scheduled. Although no reading material is assigned, students typically read the Foxfire books and numerous biographical essays, in order to get guidance in writing their papers. In the last part of the quarter, students meet together regularly and write formal expository essays. Students taking this course are reported to be more animated, more motivated, and more dedicated to their work than are students in conventional courses; their enthusiasm is revealed in student evaluations filled out at the end of the course. (GW)

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AN EXPERIMENTAL ENGLISH 1002 COURSE

Georgia Tech students cannot be lumped into one category any more than all teachers can be categorized by one all-encompassing adjective. But, generally speaking, Tech students are a technically oriented group keenly interested in progress, life, and mathematical-scientific relationships. Though ostensibly these are the main concerns of Tech students, this breed of mankind is very human and therefore very sensitive to the humanities. The experimental English 1002 course at Georgia Tech focuses on this humanism. The course offers the student what he sees as pragmatic and relevant skills as well as humanistic insights.

English 1002 at Georgia Tech is an advanced composition course with the stated goals of "improvement in style and mastery of the form and mechanics of writing." It is easy to see how such goals turn off an aspiring young technically oriented student. The experimental English 1002 course motivates the student, appeals to and utilizes his capabilities, while meeting the specified goals. This course is partly original and partly an adaptation of the Foxfire Project.

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While meeting the goals of 1002, this experimental course involves more writing than the regular course, more kinds of writing because it includes business writing as well as expository. It even goes beyond the goals by offering experience in oral communication, creativity, and ingenuity, as well as individual responsibility.

The way it works is: the first two weeks of a ten-week quarter, the students meet regularly on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday as scheduled. During these one-hour meetings they get a crash course in the fundamentals and refinements of writing, i.e., they get drill and practice in such basics as grammar, punctuation, organization, and other handbook matters. Also they get initiated for the course, which involves matching each student with a member of the Palmer House, a home for Golden Agers across the street from Georgia Tech. The proximity of the home and the loneliness of the inhabitants make interviews with the elderly there easy.

Then during the next four weeks of the quarter students meet in formal classroom situation only on Mondays. The other two days (or equivalent time) they interview their assigned old person and write a paper that grows out of the interview. They also write a memorandum to me, telling the time of their interview, the outcome, the purpose of their paper, and any other related matters they want me to know. So they are responsible for making contact with their old person, setting up an appointment, conducting an interview, then writing a paper from the interview and also writing a memorandum reporting their activities.

They choose their purpose--whether to narrate, describe, inform, or whatever--and they choose their mode of development. They begin, so to speak, with a wad of putty that they mold into an artistic creation.

On Mondays during these four weeks, students read to the class their writing; during this time, they get needed instruction in matters of composition. Also they get ideas for effective ways to handle material. Their horizon is broadened for ways to mold thought and achieve desired results. Lively discussions ensue, even about such prosaic matters as grammar and punctuation because these fundamentals are not taught in isolated exercises, but in integral facets of the writing process. Mechanics of writing thus become tools, not masters of students. Students begin to perceive mechanics as aids to communication, not stumbling blocks understood only by secretaries.

Frequent conferences are scheduled with students, and I am available for impromptu conferences at specified times every day, as well as at the regularly assigned Wednesday and Friday periods.

Then the last two weeks of the quarter, students meet together in a structured classroom situation to concentrate on the Regents' Examination. During this time, they write formal, expository essays.

I wish I could say this course is "the Word," but I cannot. Frankly, I saw no great difference in the performance on the final examination of the experimental class and the regular 1002 section, but the attitude of the students in the two classes was vastly different. The students in the experimental section were

animated, motivated, and dedicated. They took pride in their work. They responded to the respect and responsibility given them. They reacted as mature young people on the job rather than as brow beaten students trying to make it in the System. Their evaluations express their reactions. All evaluations enthusiastically favored the innovative technique over the conventional. Some typical responses are:

> "Instead of making us write on 'Why I Chose to Attend School at Georgia Tech,' the teacher sent us out into the world to find our topics."
>
> "The friendship and knowledge about the past that I gained through my elderly friend make the course one of the most valuable courses I've ever taken."
>
> "This English 1002 provided a variety and showed that English can be fun."
>
> "The freedom to explore the mind of Julia Joyner, the streets of New Orleans, and new snow on a sunny morning was in itself a learning experience that won't soon be forgotten."
>
> "I didn't think of it as just three more credit hours; I really got into it and enjoyed what I was doing."
>
> "Getting out and actually talking with people to gather information for an essay is an exciting and rewarding method."
>
> "The class learned how to communicate with a total stranger and convey their finding in writing. I felt this was practical help, for this is probably what we will be doing once we leave Tech."
>
> "It gave me the opportunity to learn independently about things not taught in school. I learned how to communicate better with people and how to transform spoken words into a paper. (It was sort of like being a reporter.) I feel that this Engtish course has been very helpful to me."

At first, I was concerned that the students would not do enough reading in the course because no reader was required; but, actually,

most students did more reading than would have been assigned in a reader. Most of them read all three Foxfire books, numerous "My Most Unforgettable Character" essays from the READER'S DIGEST, and other magazine articles and essays in books to give them direction. They all said they spent more time on this course than on their regular previous English course, but they did not begrudge the time.

Humanistic concern was another unanticipated reward of the course. Students learned, some with difficulty, to bridge the generation gap. In this instance, they were the pursuers, not the pursued. They made the overtures. This plight was new to them. They learned much about human relations. They were often inconvenienced, even thwarted, by their elderly person's forgetting about their appointment or arbitrarily breaking it at the last minute. They learned that they had to make allowance for lost time and so started scheduling appointments early in the week so that if they proved abortive, another appointment could be effected before the Monday deadline. They learned how to handle an interview. (Incidentally, they learned not to ask the elderly person about his health.) And they learned how to be appealing like a salesman because they wanted to get another interview! But being appealing was not difficult, for perhaps the greatest humanistic quality of the course was the rapport built up between the aged and the youth. The students grew to respect, admire, almost love the withered, knarled, has-beens who had never made a million dollars; indeed, many of whom did not even speak standard English. This is an achievement because

most of the students are from high medium-income families who are relatively socially prominent and snobbish. These students acquired a broadened value standard on human worth. Compassion came with understanding, for numerous students expressed real concern that because of pressures of time they must of necessity cease their regular visit with their elderly friend after the quarter ended. They wanted to be sure the elderly person understood why they would not be calling. Some sent Easter cards to their new friend; all planned to keep in touch.

In addition to this humane compassion, students gained humanistic insight through an awareness of technological advances. They perceived where we have come from in relation to where we are scientifically and technologically. Through a new historical awareness, they came to appreciate more fully modern technology. A sample of some titles of their papers reveals this historical view: "The Automobile: Effects on Society," "Events from Miss Hornsby's Childhood," "Recreation in Farm Country," "Remedies for Various Ailments," "Killing a Chicken," "How to Make a Rabbit Trap," "Gardening and Farming," "An Autumn Long Ago," "A Christmas Years Ago," "A Candy Factory," and "Childhood in the Early 1900's."

Another advantage not to be overlooked is the fact that now the student not only had something interesting and worthwhile that he really wanted to write about, but also he had material that he knew more about than the teacher. Formerly he had had to analyze a poem that the teacher had written a term paper on in graduate school or to discuss such remote and

profound subjects as death and birth, which interested the teacher, but not the student. Now he, not the teacher, chose his subject, and he, not the teacher, was the authority on the content. So instead of catering to the teacher's interpretation of literary works or philosophical tenets, the student was in the position of authority. He, not the teacher, knew the material, so he was not trying to write what the teacher had tried to teach him or expected him to say; instead he was trying to communicate his own material to the teacher. Clear writing, then, became a necessity. As one student said (if you can unravel it): "A major point in English is to learn how to write so as to be able to communicate on paper with others without the loss of your intended meaning. In 1001 you wrote on subjects alone, but according to Dr. Naugle's course, you communicate first then write, which in my opinion is a grand way to learn how to write so as to communicate." (Maybe he needs to retake the course, but he is sincere!)

The memorandum afforded a precise, concise body of writing for strict attention to form and mechanics. Teachers' penchant for spelling, punctuation, and mechanics could find vent here. These memoranda afforded a means for disciplined writing to balance the creative essay and so broadened the course's offering.

This experimental 1002 course might best be summarized by the student who wrote: "You learned by doing things and by actual experiences rather than just talking about it. I learned, not

only how to write better papers, but also how to talk to people and get them to talk about themselves. I also learned to work on my own time and responsibility. This is a worthwhile course."